

PEOPLE & THINGS

THE most inscrutable personality in Formosa is Lieut. - General Chiang Ch'eng-kuo, Chief of the Ministry of National Defence and head of the Island's Security Police, and the by no means popular elder son of General Chiang Kai-shek. This tough little man, who is totally lacking in the personal magnetism of his father, has not hesitated to exercise his considerable authority by means of summary trials, quick executions and other ruthless security measures.

Yet on the death of his father, who is sixty-seven next month, he would be his obvious successor and the State Department are already looking askance at a Crown Prince who was at one time a great admirer of Soviet Russia (where he spent several years), who is married to a Russian and who introduced the Communist system of political commissars into the Nationalist Army.

Admiralissimo ?

RUMOUR, probably inspired by the mainland, already has it that Peking has a secret understanding with Chiang Cheng-kuo, but this canard may be solely for the purpose of still further confusing American policy *vis-a-vis* Formosa.

It is at any rate certain that the more liberal elements in the island would be glad to see a reduction in the authority of this equivocal figure and some assurance that the eventual successor to the Generalissimo would be elected by a free vote.

An alternative candidate for the Nationalist leadership might be found among senior officers in the Nationalist Navy, most of whom were trained towards the end of the last war at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

Notable among them is Rear-Admiral Llu Kwang-kai, a forceful, debonair and pro-British officer who has been in command of the blockade of the Straits, and who commands the loyalty and affection not only of the Navy but also of the essentially maritime native population of Formosa.

The Harder Pull

WHEN a team of Russian oarsmen visited Henley for this year's regatta, every effort was made to show them something of English life.

I feel, however, that they might

By ATTICUS

well have been invited to Newquay, where there exists a rowing club unique in the world. Its fleet is composed of 30-foot six-oared pilot gigs. Of these rare and venerable craft the newest was built in 1870, while the oldest, the Newquay, is at least 135 years old.

Races are rowed fortnightly over a six-mile triangular course in Newquay Bay. Bad weather is rarely allowed to hold up the schedule; and I hear that recently the six gigs were raced across sixteen miles of rough water from Padstow to Newquay. The winner took two and three-quarter hours.

The club maintains a standing challenge to visiting oarsmen. Perhaps next year the Russians may be persuaded to take it up.



A "Mob Pistol"

THIS curious weapon, which I spotted in the latest catalogue of Wallis & Wallis of Lewes, the antique arms specialists, is an example of the rare "mob pistol" or "duck foot" which came into use shortly after 1800 among prison officers and tough sea captains. It fired four balls simultaneously and must have been a formidable deterrent to the mutinous.

A crude engraving of a whaling ship on the side of this specimen conjures up a picture of a ragged, snarling crew held at bay by the eyes of the captain and the four gaping mouths of his pistol.

But then the crystal ball clouds over for, 150 years later, we find a certain Mr. Wallis writing in a catalogue: "In view of the distance from the priming pan to the barrels, approximately 3 inches, it is unlikely that this weapon was successful, although its appearance is formidable."

The Wallaces

ONE of the most remarkable and certainly one of the most powerful married couples in America, Mr. and Mrs. De Witt Wallace, will pay their first visit to London at the end of this month.

In 1922, in one room over a garage in Pleasantville, New York State, the Wallaces produced the first number of "The Reader's Digest," a magazine which now has a monthly circulation of over 17 million in twelve languages.

The unexceptionable formula upon which the most popular periodical in the world is based—Christian ethics, home-spun wisdom, good humour, optimism—may be anathema to the "progressive," but it would be impossible

to name a magazine whose influence has been so widespread and so benevolent.

Digest Militant

BOTH the Wallaces (she was an Acheson and a relative of the Earl of Gosford) are of Scottish origin, and Scottish virtues may be at the bottom of the single-minded dedication to their life's work and the privacy in which, even in America, they manage to shroud themselves.

At Pleasantville, where a somewhat oppressively gracious colonial-style building in a vast park now houses a staff of about 500, they still personally supervise the entire contents of each issue of the "Digest." Politically independent, it is not often that they unleash the massive striking power of the "Digest," but gangsterdom, racial intolerance and McCarthyism have been recent victims of the flaming sword.

The De Witt Wallaces have no children, and their only hobby outside their business is Mrs. Wallace's fine collection of modern pictures, among them a Renoir, a Manet and several Utrillos. These are known in America, to the bafflement of English visitors, as "The Wallace Collection."

Strange Hospice

WORKER-PRIESTS have lately been much in the news, and their English sympathisers will have applauded the decision to house them in the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny, near Auxerre, where Becket and Langton lived in retirement and St. Edmund is buried.

But it is ironical that the same buildings should also have been, within recent memory, one of the last European strongholds of the freethinker. It was there, under the sponsorship of Paul Desjardins, that many young men and women were privileged to witness the encounter, in amicable debate, of Gide, Malraux, Roger Martin du Gard, Berdyayev and many another great European. Nor was there lacking, during the summers of the twenties and thirties, a select contingent from Bloomsbury.

When I was last at Pontigny, in 1947, American seminarists were busy washing away the last traces of the Desjardins regime; but if Pontigny should be haunted, and the ghost of St. Edmund happens to parley with the spectre of Lytton Strachey, dialectical fireworks can be expected.

Game and Set

DURING her recent visit to Moscow, Miss Nancy Mitford met only one "intellectual"—a woman publisher from "Kniga."

"I understand you are a best-selling author," said this lady. "I have not read your books. What was your best-seller called and how many copies did it sell?"

"My most successful book was called 'The Pursuit of Love,'" said Miss Mitford and, with modest pride, "I believe it sold nearly a quarter of a million copies."

"Oh, really," said the lady publisher politely. "The last novel we published sold thirty million copies. It was called 'Cement.'"

Prang

A CORRESPONDENT writes to inquire if the earliest allusion in English verse to pianola playing in the R.A.F. is Tennyson's reference to "A wizard music roll" ("In Memoriam").